United Nations E/CN.17/IFF/1999/20

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
15 April 1999

Original: English

Commission on Sustainable Development
Intergovernmental Forum on Forests
Third session
Geneva, 3–14 May 1999

Letter dated 26 March 1999 from the Permanent Representative of Australia to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to transmit to you an executive summary of the report entitled "International forest conservation: protected areas and beyond", which was prepared by Australia in support of the Intergovernmental Forum on Forests (IFF).

At the first session of IFF, in September 1997, Australia proposed the inclusion of forest conservation and protected areas in the work areas of IFF. Subsequently, Australia commenced an initiative to develop a paper on forest conservation and protected areas for the purpose of informing discussions on this matter at the third session of IFF. Following an international workshop on this issue held at Canberra from 8 to 10 September 1998, a draft paper was circulated internationally for comment in December 1998. The paper has now been finalized as the above-mentioned report, taking into account comments received.

The report contains a set of 13 proposals for action for consideration by IFF at its third session. I believe that these proposals present a practical and forward-looking agenda for international action on forest conservation and commend the report for consideration by IFF.

I should be grateful if you could have the text of this letter and the attached executive summary of the report circulated as a document of the third session of the Intergovernmental Forum on Forests. Copies of the full report will be made available to all members and observers at the meeting itself.

(*Signed*) Penny **Wensley**
Permanent Representative

99-10710 (E) 230499

INTERNATIONAL FOREST CONSERVATION: PROTECTED AREAS AND BEYOND

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Forests have many values and are under many pressures. Whilst the world community and individual countries have responded to these pressures in a variety of ways, the responses share a common emphasis on forest conservation and sustainable forest management. This paper considers forest conservation and sustainable forest management to be complementary, interdependent and inseparable themes. It is widely accepted by the international community and individual countries that forest conservation and sustainable forest management should together aim to protect and sustain the full range of forest values - including biological diversity, ecosystem health, environmental services, and the cultural, social and economic values of forests.

Throughout history, societies have developed many approaches to protecting forest values. Since the world 's first national park, Yellowstone in the United States, was declared in 1872, the concept of protected areas has emerged as a key element of national and international strategies to protect forest values. Protected areas now make a fundamental contribution to the conservation of the world's natural and cultural resources. Around 8 per cent of the world's forests are currently within protected areas, but the representation of particular forest ecosystems varies widely. The effectiveness of these protected areas in achieving conservation goals also varies widely.

Over the last few decades, there has been a growing acknowledgment that forest conservation goals can only be met through integrated strategies which include but are not limited to protected areas. This broader vision for forest conservation is one in which forest conservation strategies are more diverse but also more integrated, more broadly based and more inclusive, and consequently more effective in achieving forest conservation goals

BROADENING OUR VISION OF FOREST CONSERVATION

The broader vision for forest conservation recognises that protected areas are the cornerstone of conservation strategies. It also recognises that protected areas are seldom, if ever, adequate to achieve conservation goals in isolation from the complementary management of other forests, and that we need to develop integrated forest conservation strategies which incorporate but are not limited to protected areas. It recognises that simply setting targets for the number or extent of protected areas is insufficient to achieve conservation goals, and that effective management for conservation is critical to the success of forest conservation efforts. The broader vision for forest conservation recognises that achieving and sustaining forest conservation also requires the integration of social and economic goals into conservation planning processes. It therefore recognises the development of more collaborative participatory modes of conservation planning and management as essential to achieving and sustaining forest conservation goals.

The broader vision for forest conservation envisages conservation goals being attained by cumulative contributions from many sources - a continuum of contributions from across the forest landscape. Protected areas are important mechanisms for providing some of this contribution, but other important and sometimes irreplaceable contributions will come from forests conserved on private lands, from other forests such as community and sacred forests, and from forests managed under sustainable forest management regimes. Consequently, the constituency for forest conservation is broadened - to include, for example, private forest owners, local authorities, indigenous and local communities, commercial forest managers and workers, forest-based industries and other industries requiring access to forested land - all of whom can contribute to conservation goals in complementary and mutually supportive ways.

The integrated strategies necessary to deliver the broader vision for forest conservation share a number of common features, recognising:

- the diversity of forest values and benefits, and the complex relationships between achievement of conservation and sustainable development goals
- that different situations will require different strategies to achieve forest conservation goals

- that protected areas have a key role in achieving conservation goals, but are not the only means of achieving forest conservation goals
- that forests outside protected areas also have a key role in contributing to the achievement of conservation goals
- the importance of policies, institutional arrangements and adequate resources to support the achievement of forest conservation goals
- the role of management systems and processes in meeting forest conservation and sustainable management goals
- the power of partnerships between interested parties to achieve and sustain conservation goals, and
- the value of bioregional conservation planning processes which recognise and accommodate the issues identified in the preceding points.

A SUPPORTIVE POLICY ENVIRONMENT

Realising the broader vision for forest conservation requires a supportive policy environment - at all scales, from global to local, and across all sectors of society. Political and societal commitment to forest conservation, in the broader context of sustainable development, are essential for successful forest conservation. The policy commitments required are not just to forest conservation and sustainable forest management - although these are necessary - but to policy development across all sectors which is cognisant of the implications for forest conservation.

Overcoming policy failure is a prerequisite for forest conservation efforts to succeed. It is generally acknowledged that many of the underlying causes of forest loss and degradation are external to the forest sector, and that these must be addressed if forest conservation efforts are to succeed. However, there are also many policy failures within the forest sector, and poor implementation by forests and conservation agencies. In particular, the policies and programs of forest management and conservation agencies are often poorly coordinated, and poorly linked to the contributions other parties can make to forest conservation. Both the international community and individual countries can advance forest conservation by addressing the failures in policy regimes at international, national and sub-national levels. All levels of government have complementary and mutually supportive roles to play in achieving forest conservation goals.

RESOURCES TO SUPPORT FOREST CONSERVATION

Resources for forest conservation are usually limiting, often severely so. Consequent institutional weaknesses impact heavily on the achievement of forest conservation goals, and many protected area have been reduced to little more than 'paper parks'. Additional financial resources, institutional strengthening, capacity building and technology transfer are all necessary to support forest conservation initiatives. Issues of resource provision for forest conservation and sustainable use include:

- the level of resource provision necessary to achieve and sustain forest conservation goals - including the establishment and management of protected areas and other mechanisms for protection, and the implementation of sustainable forest management regimes
- the appropriate contributions of different stakeholders to the resources required for forest conservation and protected area management
- the distribution of these resources amongst those parties responsible for forest conservation and protected area management
- the fair and equitable sharing of benefits and costs, and
- the enhancement of mechanisms at both international and national levels for capacity building, information exchange, technology transfer, and monitoring and reporting in support of agreed conservation goals.

A variety of financial instruments and mechanisms, operating at both international and national levels, and involving both the public and private sectors, can help generate the resources necessary to support forest conservation. Developing market arrangements which work in favour of forest conservation is central to securing adequate resources for forest conservation. A diversity of such arrangements, both traditional and

emerging, can generate resources for forest conservation. Conservation trust funds, of which the Global Environment Facility is one example, have proved particularly effective in many circumstances. New mechanisms, such as tradeable conservation credits or the Clean Development Mechanism and Joint Implementation activities of the Kyoto Protocol, represent promising means of directing resources to forest conservation.

PARTNERSHIPS TO SUPPORT FOREST CONSERVATION

Partnerships between all those with interests in forest conservation are a foundation of the broader vision for forest conservation. Interested parties include, variously, the international, national and local communities; governments at various levels; non-government organisations; the private sector; and forest owners and users, including indigenous peoples, local communities and forest workers. Partnerships can improve conservation outcomes from all forests - those in protected areas, those managed for production, and other forests under private and community ownership. Transboundary partnerships are particularly important in many situations.

Because many civil society actors have an interest in forest conservation, many forms of partnership are possible in support of forest conservation goals. A variety of partnerships - operating at different scales and levels - will be necessary to address different challenges to, and take advantage of different opportunities for, forest conservation. Developing partnerships for forest conservation to their full potential requires a willingness on the part of government to devolve authority to other actors willing to assume it, whilst retaining sufficient interest and influence to ensure that the public interest is respected, and providing sufficient resources to support devolved responsibilities.

INTEGRATED STRATEGIES FOR FOREST CONSERVATION

In most countries, protected areas and forests protected by other reservation mechanisms will comprise only a minority of the forest area. An effective conservation strategy will recognise and capitalise on the complementary roles of forests within and outside protected areas. The particular forest conservation strategy adopted by a country will reflect its individual circumstances - particularly its pattern of land tenure, its forest history and land use, and its cultural values and political processes. The challenge is to develop integrated conservation strategies that afford adequate and sustained protection to forest values through the most appropriate mechanisms for each nations circumstances: a network of protected areas, other mechanisms for protection, and the complementary sustainable management of forests outside protected areas.

Developing and implementing successful forest conservation strategies depends on conservation planning processes which recognise environmental, economic and social values. These conservation planning processes are based on a number of principles:

- they should incorporate explicit social, economic and environmental goals
- they accept that our knowledge of forest values is incomplete and adopt methods for making the most of what we do know
- explicit and transparent processes for involving all stakeholders are a critical part of effective conservation planning and implementation
- information should be provided to stakeholders in a form which is culturally appropriate and maximises their opportunities for engagement, and
- the negotiation and agreement process to develop the integrated forest conservation strategy should be designed to explore a wide range of land use and conservation management options, to identify the least cost option which best meets all goals.

The best geographic basis for conservation planning is a 'bioregion', which is defined by ecosystem rather than cadastral boundaries but recognises the practical limitations imposed by existing administrative boundaries. The development of integrated forest conservation strategies on a bioregional basis is consistent with the ecosystem approach endorsed by the Conference of Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity.

Conservation planning tools have been developed to facilitate the conservation planning process and maximise the achievement of forest conservation goals at minimum opportunity cost. These tools are widely applicable and adaptable to different levels of data and technology.

IMPLEMENTATION, MONITORING AND REVIEW

The development and implementation of management systems and processes which protect forest values are issues for forests both within and outside protected areas. The development of sustainable forest management regimes incorporating criteria and indicators and mechanisms to regulate forest practices within environmental management systems can assist those responsible for sustainable forest management. A process for monitoring and reviewing the effectiveness of protected area management can similarly assist protected area managers. All management for forest conservation needs to be adaptive, with the capacity for continuous improvement based on information from monitoring and review processes. It will generally be necessary to review the effectiveness of existing protected area systems within the broader context of the development of an integrated forest conservation strategy.

CONCLUSIONS

This paper articulates a broader vision for forest conservation. This broader vision is founded on integrated strategies for forest conservation, that include but are not limited to protected areas. It recognises the need to integrate the sustainable management of protected areas and other forested land to jointly conserve the full range of forest values. Achieving the broader vision for forest conservation requires a supportive policy environment, adequate human and financial resources, partnerships for forest conservation, appropriate conservation planning processes, and adaptive management of all forests.

A set of 13 proposals for action at all levels from international to local is presented for consideration.

PROPOSALS FOR ACTION

COMMITMENT TO FOREST CONSERVATION

1. The international community and countries articulate a specific commitment to the goal of conservation of the full range of forest values of all forest types, and develop and implement policies and programs to achieve this goal, recognising that this can be achieved through a range of conservation strategies and mechanisms, reflecting different national circumstances, and implemented through both a network of protected areas and in forests outside protected areas.

2. The international community and countries seek to ensure that any future international arrangements and mechanisms for forests include forest conservation as a core area of activity and develop an agenda for action on forest conservation, including the staged implementation of agreed proposals for action.

A SUPPORTIVE POLICY ENVIRONMENT

3. The international community and countries commit to achieving effective implementation and coordination at global, regional, national and local levels, of the relevant provisions of international policies and mechanisms to support forest conservation goals including:

- the Convention on Biological Diversity
- the World Heritage Convention
- the Framework Convention on Climate Change
- the Convention to Combat Desertification
- other Conventions such as CITES and RAMSAR
- the International Tropical Timber Agreement, and
- processes for the development of criteria and indicators of sustainable forest management.

4. Countries develop and implement policies to maintain a permanent forest estate that is managed for a continuum of conservation and sustainable use objectives.

5. Countries address inappropriate policies, including perverse incentives and cross-sectoral policies that impact adversely on forest conservation values, and policy implementation failures that impede forest conservation.

6. International financial institutions and donors seek to minimise adverse impacts of sectoral policy responses and structural adjustment packages on forest conservation goals.

7. Countries include forest conservation and protected areas as integral components of national forest policies, legislation and programs, and improve cross-sectoral coordination with policies and programs that impact on forest conservation.

RESOURCES TO SUPPORT FOREST CONSERVATION

8. The international community and countries recognise that increased financial and human resources for forest conservation are needed to support the achievement of forest conservation goals, and seek to develop and utilise existing and new mechanisms for resource provision including:

- conservation trust funds
- the Clean Development Mechanism and Joint Implementation activities of the Kyoto Protocol of the Framework Convention on Climate Change, and
- specific measures such as tradeable conservation credits, supportive taxation regimes, direct charges and financial assistance.

9. The international community and countries develop and implement financial mechanisms that aim to achieve equitable distribution of the costs and benefits of forest conservation and, in particular, provide incentives to forest-dependent communities which forego potential income to pursue forest conservation options.

10. The international community and financial institutions provide adequate human and financial resources to support the achievement of forest conservation and protected areas goals through:

- institutional strengthening and capacity building
- research and development
- access to and transfer of technology
- technical and scientific cooperation, and
- community education and extension.

PARTNERSHIPS TO SUPPORT FOREST CONSERVATION

11. The international community and countries seek to enable various forms of partnerships in support of forest conservation including, *inter alia:*

- collaborative forest management arrangements with local and indigenous communities
- partnerships with non-government organisations, the private sector and research institutions, and
- transboundary arrangements.

INTEGRATED CONSERVATION STRATEGIES

12. Countries develop and implement integrated strategies for forest Conservation through systems and processes which include the following elements:

- recognition of the full range of forest values and of environmental, economic and social goals
- a bioregional basis for conservation planning
- open and transparent processes for stakeholder participation
- best use of all available data, including indigenous and local knowledge
- reserve design and selection based on the reserve network principles for biodiversity conservation, and
- use of appropriate mechanisms to achieve forest conservation goals, within and outside protected areas, recognising the complementary and interdependent roles of protected areas, forests protected by other mechanisms and forests managed under sustainable forest management regimes.

13. Countries review the effectiveness of forest conservation strategies, in particular existing protected area networks, in relation to environmental, social, legal and economic objectives, within the broader objective of developing an integrated forest conservation strategy.

FOREWARD

In recognising the urgent need for action for global forest conservation, Australia proposed the inclusion of forest conservation and protected areas in the work program of the Intergovernmental Forum on Forests (IFF). The development of a paper in support of this initiative, and the forthcoming discussions on forest conservation and protected areas in the IFF, are both timely and important.

This paper captures an emerging global consensus on forest conservation and protected area issues, particularly those related to the effectiveness of protected areas, the development of integrated forest conservation strategies, the role of partnerships and the necessity for a supportive policy environment. The paper also provides useful guidance on actions to assist the global community to better achieve forest conservation objectives.

In recent years Australia has made a major commitment to developing and implementing integrated forest conservation and sustainable management systems through its Regional Forest Agreement (RFA) process. The RFA process, which aims to establish a world class forest reserve system as well as an internationally competitive and ecologically sustainable forest products industry, involves comprehensive assessments of forest values, extensive stakeholder participation and the negotiation of forest management options.

The diversity of social, cultural and environmental circumstances around the world requires that countries adopt forest conservation models that are appropriate their individual circumstances. The holistic approach promoted in this paper is a useful framework for all countries to draw on in developing their own particular integrated forest conservation models.

I commend this paper to governments and the international community, and encourage all relevant stakeholders to develop bold agendas for implementing the proposals for action in the coming years.

Robert Hill
Minister for the Environment and Heritage
Australia